

A spam-free museum

SPAMfighter relieves employees of Museum Volkenkunde from the frustration caused by spam

The Museum Volkenkunde (National Museum of Ethnology) in the Dutch city of Leiden was created as the result of the collector's mania and scientific curiosity that was prevalent in the Netherlands in the beginning of the 19th century. Back then, the Dutch were gradually starting to become somewhat proud of their heritage. The Museum Volkenkunde was founded in 1837 at the behest of King William I. It incorporated the collection of Philipp Franz von Siebold, a fanatical collector of Japanese art, utensils and natural history items. By now, the Museum Volkenkunde has developed into a modern institute that moves with the times, including the latest developments in the field of IT.

Compared to other museums, the Leiden-based museum has intensive contact with the countries and communities of which it wishes to include cultural heritage in its collection. These days it is extremely easy to maintain contacts with far-away countries like Surinam, Indonesia and Japan through e-mail. Museum Volkenkunde has a proprietary server fleet, an Internet server as well as a high-speed Internet connection that is made available by the University of Leiden. Added to which, the organisation uses approximately a hundred thin clients as workstations. The public spaces of the museum have been equipped with touch screens. "These screens show the contours of objects in the matching showcase. Whenever a visitor touches the contours on the screen, relevant information on the museum piece will be displayed. From as early as 2001, this has allowed us to do away with boring, signs that are difficult to read", comments Jos Taekema, the head of the Sector Information Services department of the Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden.

Solid research

"With respect to our IT environment, until the end of 2007 the main cause of irritation for our staff members was the huge volume of spam we received. For our conservators in particular this was a constant thorn in the side. Since they form the recipients of the main body of our mail traffic, they also received a lot of unsolicited mail", Taekema comments. Besides, our conservators are abroad regularly, often for a week or more, so they will not be using their pc. Consequently, upon their return, they are swamped with junk mail. "For this reason, our systems administrators started looking for a solution. After performing solid online research, which included reading messages on forums and keeping track of the reactions, they came up with SPAMfighter. Our systems administrators came across a lot of good reviews about this solution," Taekema continues.

Museum Volkenkunde selected SPAMfighter to keep its IT environment free from spam. "The main benefit of SPAMfighter is that the solution not only offers a regular spam check, but also involves the global SPAMfighter community in the struggle against junk mail. Users that receive unsolicited mail can mark the message as such. If a sufficient number of SPAMfighter mark the same message the filter will block these messages for users across

the globe. These properties, in combination with the solution's excellent price/quality ratio, formed the main considerations behind our selection of SPAMfighter," Taekema adds.

'Unblock' button

Museum Volkenkunde has been liberated from spam for over a year. Where previously the percentage of unsolicited mail was around fifty per cent, currently only one or two junk mails are received by each employee each day. Added to which, e-mails that are accidentally blocked by SPAMfighter will not be lost. Taekema: "Each employee will find a separate 'SPAMfighter' folder in their Outlook environment. At any time, they can quickly check the contents of this folder to see if it does not accidentally contain a legitimate message. If they do find a legitimate message, they will be able to salvage it by clicking the 'Unblock' button on the SPAMfighter taskbar. All our staff members have to do to keep their mailbox completely free from spam is to empty the SPAMfighter folder from time to time. SPAMfighter will fully relieve them of all the other tasks."

Global approach

The system will send all messages addressed to the volkenkunde.nl domain to the SPAMfighter server in the shape of a header – a small text file. In this way users can be sure that no third party gets to view the content of their messages. On the SPAMfighter server, the state-of-the-art SPAMfighter technology will evaluate whether any of these messages comprise junk mail. After this check, the museum will receive the mail. Messages marked as spam will be stored in the recipient's SPAMfighter folder. The systems administrators of the Museum Volkenkunde have made a conscious decision to assign each staff member of the museum their own spam folder. "In this way, we minimise the workload of our IT department, while our staff members maintain a grip on all of their mail. Imagine what would happen if a legitimate e-mail gets stuck in the filter while only our systems administrators have access to the blocked message. In such a scenario, e-mails would never reach their intended recipient. That is something we are keen to prevent," comments Taekema,

Museum Volkenkunde has been using SPAMfighter since the end of 2007, and it no longer wishes to do without it. "Compared to traditional blocking lists/blacklists, this solution is an absolute relief. SPAMfighter is a powerful solution that puts a stop to irritating and harmful spam in various ways. It has allowed us to eliminate a cause of irritation for our staff members, and our systems administrators now only have to perform a minimum number of management tasks. As such, e-mail is now the perfect basis for quick communication with contacts in far-away places. In this way, the collector's mania and scientific curiosity that once provided the basis for this museum can continue to flow freely, but now through digital channels," Taekema concludes.